

17 Sunday A

July 25, 2008

Cathedral

10:00 and Noon

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**“We know...”**—That’s how the Apostle Paul writes it in his letter. It’s not a guess, nor a wish; instead, it’s born of conviction: **“We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”**

Quite frankly, these days I can’t seem to shake off that line from St. Paul’s letter. The skeptic in me may well want to push it aside as Pollyanna, dismissing it as simply pious make-believe to claim that *everything* will turn out all right in the end.

A handful of days ago my family and I buried our Mother, thus putting a period after ten years of Alzheimer’s disease from which she suffered. **“We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”** *“All things work for good”*? Some days I don’t feel so sure. And what about the family within the Cathedral Parish who, earlier this summer, buried their eight-year old son following his 13-month struggle with cancer? What about the worker who plays by all the rules and works hard, but in the end loses her home to a foreclosure—a dream shattered. What about the person who struggles uphill with mental illness, and through the maze of isolation and suffering, wonders if *anything* works for good?

Oh, I suggest there’s the skeptic in many of us. You can name your own calamity, your own heartache, and then nix the **“all”** in the Apostle Paul’s assertion that **“all things work for good for those who love God.”** Oh, it might be “most things,” or “some things,” but—we might bluntly say to God’s Word—not **“all things work for good for those who love God.”**

Sisters and brothers: We’re in the opening days of the Year of St. Paul (as Pope Benedict wants the church to observe the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Paul’s birth), and on this summer weekend we’re at the halfway point of listening to Paul in his most famous of letters, that to the church of Rome. Paul would counter the skeptic in me and any other believer, and turn our focus squarely on the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. In *that* mystery, we

all find the gift of salvation, and because of that gracious gift... yes ultimately **“all things work for good for those who love God.”**

Within my first year here at the Cathedral Parish, a parishioner sent me a note and quoted from her favorite poet, Wendall Berry, who ended one of his poems by saying, ***“Practice Resurrection! Practice Resurrection!”***

Yes, for Paul the resurrection is not something that happened twenty centuries ago to Jesus alone. It’s not simply a past event, although it is founded on that first Easter Sunday. As Paul puts it today, by grace we are to **“be conformed to the image of God’s Son, so that he might be the firstborn.”**

It’s at the heart of St. Paul’s teaching: by faith and through baptism we are immersed into that very mystery of Jesus’ dying and rising, and we are to practice that mystery day in and day out.

I believe that with every fiber of my being. I have loved the practice in the church’s funeral rite that, as the casket carrying the deceased’s body is first brought to the church, it is sprinkled with baptismal water, reminding us of that claim of resurrection that defeats the sting of death. Oh, when I did it as Mother’s casket was first brought to the church, I knew our hope in the midst of grief.

And we are to “practice resurrection” together, Sunday after Sunday. We are not to do it singly; we do it together—as church. That’s why it has touched me deeply the expressions of loving support and care that you have shown my family and me during these days of sadness and letting go. We “practice resurrection” when we allow Christ Jesus to lead us through our pain and emptiness and heartache, and in his grace know the hope of his life—now and in eternity. I saw that tenacity of hope in my Mother, and I depend on God’s grace to make it real in my life now.

*“Practice resurrection.”* We are called as church within both our joys and sorrows to trust that God’s plan and purpose are truly behind all that happens to us, for God is really in control. And so we give thanks this Lord’s Day, and we join with Paul in saying slowly and with conviction—yes, **“we know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his promise.”** And as we say it, we keep on by grace “practicing resurrection!”